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Interlingual cover versions: How popular songs travel round the world

Abstract

The article focuses on interlingual cover versions of popular songs - covers sung in a language other than the 'original'. Through a variety of disciplinary perspectives, including translation studies, adaptation studies and literary criticism, it examines an iconic song from a 'peripheral' country, which circulated the globe in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Tarkan and Sezen Aksu's Turkish hit *Şımarık* ('Spoilt') represents a noteworthy case of a cultural product in circulation across linguistic and cultural borders, with at least thirty four cover versions in twenty four languages. These covers were put into a wide range of contexts and to different uses in their new destinations, attesting to the fecundity afforded by this song. The article discusses concepts such as adaptation, palimpsest, parody, exoticism, reiteration, globalisation and cosmopolitanism in relation to popular music covers. Its main objectives are to attract attention to the multiple factors underlying the production and reception of interlingual covers, to their prevalence and spread outside the Western European popular music scenes, where the current research concentrates, and to the diversity of approaches that can be taken in studying this phenomenon.

Keywords

Interlingual cover songs; popular music; translation; adaptation; Turkish popular music

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Introduction

This article draws attention to the phenomenon of interlingual cover versions, i.e. covers sung in a different language, and especially to those originating from 'peripheral' languages and cultures. In academia, neither popular music studies nor translation studies have given sufficient attention to interlingual covers, despite their prevalence as an instrument of intercultural import/export. Popular music studies prefers to concentrate on intralingual covers from different time periods and usually approaches the matter from the point of view

of ‘removing a song from the original context of its authorship and placing it in a different social/historical milieu’ (Davis 2010: 112), emphasizing different eras, voices, styles, homage or criticism. Translation studies, on the other hand, finds it challenging to take up cases of interlingual give-and-take where there is little or no transfer of meaning in the lyrics involved.

Even in recent publications within popular music studies that approach their subject matter from a cultural studies angle (e.g. Clayton *et al.* 2012, Wall 2003), discussions on interlingual exchanges in and through music are virtually non-existent. This may partly be due to ‘the longstanding prejudice against lyric analysis in music studies’ (Straw 2012: 231), shifting the focus away from lyrics to the music itself. This lacuna is also due to the hegemonies prevalent in global music circulation. Most of the relevant research in popular music studies focuses on either what is referred to, rather controversially, as ‘world music’, or on the global travels of Anglo-American popular music in English. The debates on music elsewhere seem to focus on the implicit dichotomy of Anglophone/Western music and its others (e.g. Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000). The rest of the world’s popular music is often relegated to ethnomusicology, or to ‘local/vernacular’ branches of popular music studies. Even valuable volumes focusing on linguistic issues in relation to popular music revolve around the ‘influence’ of Anglophone music on various locales and do not touch upon interlingual covers (e.g. Berger and Carroll 2003). If the word ‘translation’ appears in popular music at all, it is almost always used metaphorically (e.g. Plasketes 2010: 26-7, 35-5; Stokes 2007:12-3), eschewing the subject of actual linguistic mediation.

Recent years have nevertheless seen a tentative increase in the number of works focusing on interlingual covers by translation studies scholars (e.g. Kaindl 2005, Tinker 2005, Franzon 2008, Susam-Sarajeva 2008, Low 2013, Fernández 2015) as well as a few scholars in popular music studies (e.g. Marc 2015). This interest has created a multiplication of terminology. Popular music scholars suggested terms such as ‘global cover versions’ (Plasketes 2010: 37), ‘musical reprise’ (Marc 2015: 9) and ‘contrafactum’.¹ These terms are rather unsatisfactory, however, as they do not elucidate what most prominently changes in the process – the language. ‘Global cover versions’ might easily be mistaken for songs travelling in their original languages, such as John Lennon’s *Imagine*, covered by many international performers, albeit mostly in English. The same term can also be associated with the uncritical embrace of globalisation within popular music industry and its equally debatable position within popular music studies. ‘Musical reprise’ can be taken in its musicological meaning, i.e. ‘repetition or reiteration of the opening material in a composition’, and once again does not indicate the change in the linguistic material. Furthermore, it introduces a rather clear-cut distinction between new lyrics written from scratch and other translation and adaptation activities (Marc 2015: 9-10), which may overlap (Susam-Saraeva 2015: 121-124). As for ‘contrafactum’, i.e. “substitution of one text for another without substantial change to the music”, it does not differentiate between new lyrics set to the same tune in the same language or in a different language.

Attempts at naming and categorising have also come from within translation studies, with the scholars wavering between ‘popular song translation’ (Kaindl 2005), ‘adaptations’ (Tinker 2005) and ‘cover songs’ (Fernandez 2015). Franzon approached the topic from the point of view of ‘singability’ and referred to ‘writing new lyrics to original music’ (2008: 380-1) as one of the possible choices in song translation. Low, on the other hand, referred to the same phenomenon as ‘replacement text’ (2013:238), differentiating between these texts, translations and adaptations. In this article, I will introduce the term ‘interlingual cover

songs', following the established terminology within translation studies in distinguishing between intralingual and interlingual translation activities. This term, I believe, clearly denotes the change from one language/culture to another, while adequately covering all the various linguistic activities which may be deployed during the process: translation, adaptation, appropriation, and rewriting of the lyrics from scratch.

The existing literature on interlingual covers has generally focused on how songs travel from what we could call, for lack of a better term, 'majority' or 'central' languages, such as English, French, Spanish and Italian, to other languages of Western Europe. There are, however, certain songs which originate from 'minor' or 'peripheral' cultures, which are then transplanted to different cultures and contexts. This article will present one such iconic song from a 'peripheral' country and examine its travels through insights gleaned from translation studies, adaptation studies, and literary criticism.

The objectives of the article go beyond foregrounding the existence and impact of interlingual covers, especially those originating from the margins. The article also aims at exploring the significance of diverse approaches and insights which could shed light on this phenomenon and thus feed into the emerging research on translation and popular music. For this purpose, the article discusses concepts such as adaptation, palimpsest, parody, exoticism, reiteration, globalisation and cosmopolitanism in relation to popular music covers, with a view to exploring the usefulness and relevance of these concepts in the study of interlingual cover songs.

***Şımarık* and its interlingual covers**

Tarkan and Sezen Aksu's 1997 hit *Şımarık* ('Spoilt')² in Turkish represents a noteworthy case of a cultural product in circulation across linguistic and cultural borders, with at least thirty four cover versions in twenty four languages (see Appendix 2).³ *Şımarık* is Tarkan's debut single; by 1997, he had already released three albums, but never a song in single format due to the album-orientated nature of the Turkish music industry. The song's lyrics were written by Sezen Aksu, acclaimed Turkish composer, lyricist and singer, often referred to as the 'Queen of Turkish pop'. Music was credited to Tarkan, Aksu and Ozan Çolakoğlu at the time of release.⁴ The single was produced by Raks Müzik, administered by Universal Polygram, and was later incorporated into Tarkan's album *Ölürüm Sana* ('I'd Die for You', 1997).

Şımarık is generally considered Tarkan's signature song in Europe and beyond. It was released in France in 1998 and the rest of the world in 1999, from the compilation album *Tarkan*. When the album's single was released in 1999 in Europe it sold two million copies, becoming No.1 in Belgium, No 2 in Norway, No. 3 in Switzerland, Sweden, Netherlands, and France, and No. 6 in Germany, remaining in charts between 12-20 weeks.⁵ Sales went gold in Europe and platinum in Latin America where the single knocked Enrique Iglesias off the top slot.⁶ The song also appeared in soundtracks, including French movie *Beau Travail* (1999) and American *XX/XY* (2002).

Regardless of its international success in the original Turkish version, and maybe also due to this success, *Şımarık* was covered extensively in different languages. The spread of the song was relatively slow as it was released in the pre-Web 2.0 era; nevertheless, within a decade, most of the interlingual covers attained some success within their own music scenes. The second English version, 'Kiss Kiss', is the most well-known among them, as Holly

Valance's first number one single in both Australia and the U.K. in 2002. However, somewhat contrary to my initial assumptions, the song seems to have spread directly from its Turkish original, and not through the relay of the two English covers, as indicated by the release dates and other circumstantial evidence (except Cantonese and Korean, which replicate the opening instrumentation of the Valance version).

Both the Turkish song and its cover versions seem to have lived on in a variety of contexts. In order to give the readers a taste of how people have been listening to this song in their daily lives (DeNora 2000), I would like to cite a couple of examples. Friends and colleagues have recounted instances where they listened, danced, and exercised to the Turkish song in 2010s in Zumba classes at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland; as background music for dance routines, especially belly-dancing, in Mainland China and Taiwan;⁸ as the soundtrack to the opening credits of the Brazilian primetime telenovella *Salve Jorge* (2012-2013); and, as a popular wedding dance for Jewish Americans and Israeli Jews. For some, the song was 'part of adolescence', a key song in parties in countries as diverse as Costa Rica, France, Switzerland, and Brazil. It was a song of 'emancipation', of 'growing up'. At a time when disco dance music was spreading like wildfire globally, it didn't matter what the lyrics said or in which language. In its global travels, despite the change in language, singer, instrumentation and arrangement, the function of the song remained the same: an invitation to dance.

Dancing in your own language

Dance is foregrounded in nineteen of the music videos of the interlingual covers I could access online. Towards the end of his article on musical cosmopolitanism, Stokes ponders: 'Could music and dance move [...] according to an interior logic, and not, simply, the logic of social movement and politics?' (2007: 14). This interior logic Stokes alludes to has everything to do with the affective and kinaesthetic dimensions of popular music. With Stokes, I would also argue that 'to neglect the element of pleasure and play in the global circulation of musical practice [...] would be to make a serious mistake' (*ibid.*: 15). For the international audiences, it did not seem to matter whether this song originated from a neighbouring or a far-flung country, a socio-politically 'dominant' or 'weaker' one. What did matter were the uses the music was put to within the local contexts and whether these uses were in keeping with the kinaesthetic dimension.

Linda Hutcheon's influential theory of adaptation is structured upon the distinction whether a media or genre is more amenable to tell stories (e.g. novels), to show them (e.g. performance) or 'to interact physically and kinaesthetically with them' (e.g. videogames) (2006: xiv). Songs, especially dance-oriented ones such as *Şımarık*, partake in all three modes: through lyrics, arrangement, and music, they may tell a particular story; the accompanying video(s) may enhance the stories through the performance of the singer(s) and other artists; and ultimately, these songs succeed when they stimulate their audience to physically join in.

Although some scholars would emphasize music's distinctive qualities vis-à-vis language, i.e. its nondenotativeness and iconicity, and its somatic and corporeal appeal (Shepherd 2015a: 88), when the music in question is a popular song with lyrics, the audience may want the song to be somewhat denotative, without necessarily detracting from the somatic and corporeal aspects. There are instances when an audience may prefer to dance to music whose lyrics they can relate to. The third Spanish interlingual cover, for instance, was released as part of the album *Disco Remix en Tu Idioma* (Disco Remix in Your Language, 2000). Being able to sing – and dance – in one's mother tongue can be seen as an unquestioned right or a fought-for privilege. It is often equated with 'being true to oneself', with authenticity, despite

the fact that this might be no more than an illusion (McMichael 2008). People use music as a narrative resource, to tell their own stories to themselves and others, to make sense of their lives, to construct 'a sense of self endowed with a feeling of continuity and growth' (Kotarba and Vannini 2009: 120). Through music 'we continuously self ourselves into being' (*ibid.*: 116). This kind of self-construction through music takes place in the intimate spaces of daily music consumption. The genres people pick to listen, the media they listen through, *and* the languages they choose to listen in all contribute.

Stories we tell/listen to

Song lyrics, allegedly 'propagate a simplified narrative lacking the more nuanced and complex presentation of literature or storytelling' due to constraints of form (Davis 2010: 112). Some scholars view lyrics as 'an instance of what Derrida called the supplement, an added element which is nonetheless integral to the whole (like the preface of a book, the Sunday newspaper supplement, or the soundtrack of a film)' (Chanan 2012: vii-viii). Supplements 'always present the paradox of belonging and being separate at the same time' (*ibid.*). This status as the supplement is what allows music fans to whistle away to a foreign tune, without being able to remember or articulate its lyrics (for a more detailed discussion of non-translation of lyrics see Susam-Saraeva 2015: 39-62).

There are songs, however, such as *Şımarık*, which do tell a story, even within the confines of a couple of stanzas (see Appendix 1). This is the story of a young man, presumably grown up in a traditional and patriarchal environment, having to come to terms with the novel and allegedly provocative behaviour displayed by his (former) girlfriend, whom he is nevertheless infatuated with. The lyrics of *Şımarık* display a rich and colourful array of colloquialism and idiomatic language, and focus on socio-culturally determined gender roles within Turkey in the 1990s. The lyrics do not so much display 'a positive evaluation of the emancipation of women' in Turkey at the time, as Kaindl had previously argued (2005: 254); rather, they present a subtle and humorous critique of the patriarchal conventions being threatened by this 'new woman'.

As such, *Şımarık*'s lyrics come close to being 'untranslatable'. Even if there were no further constraints imposed by the musical form, a close translation of the lyrics would be a considerable challenge. Therefore, the lyricists of the covers seem to have opted for adapting and altering the text to varying degrees. Cover songs' lyrics are often written as a form of *bricolage*, combining elements from 'music, language, vocal style, instrumentation [...] values, ideology, culture, etc. [...] appropriated from the source culture and mixed with elements from the target culture' (Kaindl 2005: 242). Within this *bricolage*, the theme of the kiss, central to *Şımarık*, is the main element transferred to all covers but one (the second Hebrew version, which I shall come back to below). Presumably, not all the lyricists had access to the meaning of the Turkish lyrics but could clearly see and hear that the song revolved around a kiss, which, once foregrounded, could increase the sensuous appeal of the cover versions.

Another aspect of the lyrics that seemed to have found repercussions in the interlingual cover versions is gender-based stereotypes. The cover versions are distributed more or less evenly between male and female lead singers. Depending on the singer's gender however, the lyrics seem to keep or change their point of view. For instance, the English lyrics, in their appeal to a Neanderthal man's sexual favours, could as well be sung by the projected female protagonist of the Turkish lyrics. The first Spanish version, by Hakim, perpetuates the *femme fatale* described in Turkish, yet without the implied threat towards deeply ingrained patriarchal values. The Montenegrin version, again by a male singer, maintains the image of

‘a tigress, cheeky and sassy’ with a ‘soul of frosted rock’. Mr. Jam’s Brazilian Portuguese version also brings out the temptress; and the Latino-Perlla duet that follows acts out this fatal attraction from both perspectives.

Translation, adaptation, appropriation, palimpsest

For an audience familiar with the Turkish song, but not with the Turkish language, these covers *act* as ‘translations’, as can be seen in the Youtube comments invoking the word. When the original set of lyrics are compared with the cover versions’ however, one finds only partial translations, usually a line or two. For instance, the Russian version includes lines such as ‘lips scarlet – colour of fire’, ‘without your embrace, I’ll die’, and the interjection ‘*El-aman*’, a nod to the ‘Eastern’ origins of the song.

These cover versions can also be approached as ‘adaptations’, as some of them adapt the Turkish ‘story’ to the genre expectations and cultural traditions of their own music scene, often turning the lyrics into an enticing love story revolving around a kiss. Then again, adaptations are expected to flag their relationship with a predecessor, acting as ‘openly acknowledged and extended reworkings’ (Hutcheon 2006: 16) of preceding cultural products. Not all the cover versions openly indicate their link to the Turkish song, however. While some, such as the Cantonese version, give credit to Sezen Aksu as the composer, others are presented as ‘anonymous’, such as the first Hebrew version by Rinat Bar.

Appreciation of adaptations usually depend on prior knowledge of the source material. Adaptation is creating something anew, keeping some intertextual references intact for receivers who are aware of the adapted material, while making sure that the adaptation can stand on its own for those who are not. To bring Hutcheon’s observations on ‘knowing’ and ‘unknowing audiences’ (2006: 120-21) into the context of interlingual covers, if the new audiences are not familiar with the song’s first version in another language, they would experience the cover song simply as a new song in their own language. On the other hand, if they are acquainted with the first version, their memory and experience of both songs will oscillate between the versions and possibly merge in the end, in the same way a palimpsest carries on traces of multiple texts. As in palimpsests, interlingual covers do not necessarily *replace* the ‘original’; a listener may first encounter the cover version and become interested in *Şımarık* later, and then maybe in Tarkan and his other songs. Priority alone does not ensure absolute authority and it certainly does not guarantee which version will be listened to first or most often. As in adaptations, for a cover song ‘to be successful in its own right, it must be so for both knowing and unknowing audiences’ (Hutcheon 2006: 121-122).

The audiences of the cover versions produced in neighbouring countries of Turkey were almost always knowing audiences, as Tarkan’s fame had quickly spread beyond the borders. He was highly popular in Russia, for instance, to the extent that his look-alikes sang in Turkish on Russian TV shows and Kirkorov covered several of Tarkan’s songs in his album *Ой, Мама, Шука Дам* (1998, imitating the Turkish title *Oynama Şıkıdım*). ‘Appropriations’, on the other hand, do not always clearly signal or acknowledge their source (Sanders 2008: 26), and the covers produced in countries further away from Turkey can mostly be considered under this rubric.

There is one thing in common to all these designations: translations, adaptations and appropriations have traditionally been subjected to denigration due to their perceived belatedness and derivativeness. Coming *after* a work seems to imply having lost the race against time, which allegedly determines originality, authority and genius. These value judgements are based on ‘easy linear structures of straightforward readings of “influence” that seem to presume a greater value in whatever comes first’ (Sanders 2008: 159). In the

case of adaptations from a traditionally ‘high-brow’ genre, such as novels, to ‘middle-brow’ or ‘culturally inferior’ ones, such as film, there are also the concerns associated with loss of value (Hutcheon 2006: 2). It is interesting to note that in the case of cover versions of *Şımarık*, the ‘knowing’ audience’s comments on Youtube invoke similar ‘moralistic words used to attack film adaptations of literature: “tampering”, “interference”, “violation” [...], “betrayal”, “deformation”, “perversion”, “infidelity” and “desecration”’ (*ibid.*). Copyright laws too support this argument of derivativeness: ‘someone else [other than the author/composer] cannot simply put new lyrics to the same tune and call it a new song: it would be a derivative work’ (Marshall 2015: 289). However, this is precisely what happens in interlingual covers: the same tune with a different set of words *becomes* a new song within a new context.

Cover versions benefit from the proven success of a given song elsewhere, cutting down the risk of failure. ‘Even in our postmodern age of cultural recycling, something – perhaps the commercial success of adaptations – would appear to make us uneasy’ observes Hutcheon (2006: 3). This unease was also reflected in the comments my colleagues passed on while helping me with the covers in their languages. The colleague with Serbian and Montenegrin cautioned that ‘this kind of music is looked down on and despised by pop and rock singers as well as by the more educated population in Serbia and Montenegro’. This was due to concerns regarding ‘cheap pop’, ‘plagiarism’, and the image of the singers involved. The Japanese version, especially with the kissing onomatopoeia, was regarded as ‘cringe-worthy’ among online commentators. A Romanian colleague declined altogether to translate the lyrics for me, as the cover version in question was extremely vulgar, and she had ‘nothing to do with the type of audience [the group] “create[s]” for’. Occasionally, these value judgements also aligned themselves with those directed to ethnic origins, as can be seen in the comments of a colleague from Israel:

It seems important to note, however, that Mizrahi music⁷ has gained consensual popularity in Israel relatively recently. It had been widely considered low brow for many years, and many still perceive it this way as it has become a crucial, noticeable part of contemporary Israeli pop music.

Despite this ambivalence, interlingual cover versions do spread across linguistic and cultural borders, and it would be useful to speculate about the underlying reasons. Hutcheon queries the appeal of adaptation and finds it in the pleasure humans derive from ‘repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise. Recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation; so too is change’ (2006: 4). When the ‘knowing’ audiences listen to a cover version in their language, they derive their pleasure from this mixture of repetition and difference, familiarity and novelty, which can also be approached through the concept of iterability.

Iterability

According to Derrida (1971/1982), a sign (e.g. a concept or a personal signature) has to be repeated and repeatable in different contexts, i.e. to be ‘iterable’, to become a sign that communicates. Paradoxically, however, the same sign can then be copied or counterfeited. Although a signature, for instance, is supposed to testify to the presence of an authentic original intention, it simultaneously sets up the possibility of an inauthentic copy. Derrida views all writing and language as citational and iterable, and infinitely so. It is of course debatable whether popular songs can be seen as communicative acts. However, since they do involve the use of language and orality, and since music itself signifies in a multitude of ways, I find it productive to use Derrida’s ideas in the context of interlingual cover songs.⁹

The popular music industry has its own contradictions. Pop songs ‘belong’ to their singers; and any other voice or persona represented in the lyrics become conflated with the personality of the pop singer, or more accurately, their media image (Eckstein 2010: 53). The popular music industry thus develops ‘an economic system where songs are specifically designed, written and produced *for* singers and specific performances, all the while the cultural authority of the multiple “composing voices” backing the singers is eclipsed by the singular authority of the performance’ (*ibid.*). *Şımarık* certainly bears the voices and signatures of its charismatic lyricist and composer Sezen Aksu, who sold more than 40 million albums worldwide, and its performer Tarkan, ‘one of a few European singers who has managed to span chart success over three continents without singing in English’.¹⁰ Once this signature is established and recognized, it opens up possibilities for citing, reiterating, reusing, and re-performing.

For Derrida, every iteration also invites an alteration; and yet iteration depends on a minimal remainder and illusion of an identity of the same so that repetition can be recognized in the first place. When one listens to the thirty four versions of *Şımarık*, as I had to do several times while writing this article, one becomes attuned to the repeated pattern, while noticing the variations introduced, depending on the language, musical tradition, distance, and audience expectations (an interesting example of this is the Indonesian version). Most importantly, iteration takes place within a potentially infinite number of possible contexts. Interestingly, earlier cover versions may ‘be just as important as contexts for some adaptations as any “original”’ (Hutcheon 2006: xiii). For instance, Bar’s first Hebrew version had introduced the tune to Jewish weddings in Israel well before Piamenta’s Talmud-based version carried it to Jewish weddings in the United States. Hakim’s *La Muchacha Turca* is taken as the basis for the L.A./Mexican version *La Muchacha Guapa*, where the reference to ‘Turkish girl’ in the title is replaced with a ‘beautiful girl’. Mr.Jam’s first Portuguese version paves the way semantically to the second and more successful version by Latino and Perlla in Brazil.

Expectations created by a particular genre, singer or group also have a strong influence on how interlingual covers will be interpreted by their new audiences. As in any other translational activity and product, not only the language is changed, but also the context of performance and reception. For instance, if the mediator is associated with a certain musical genre, then the cover version is associated with the same genre. The Greek version is thus inevitably tainted by the prevailing negative attitudes towards *skiladiko*, as the singer Pantazis was best known for songs in this denigrated genre. The Cantonese version by EO2 is embedded in film soundtracks in Hong Kong, the prelude particularly strengthening this impression. The Japanese singer Kentarō Hayami first made his fame through a TV programme for children; thus his version, despite the steamy lyrics, was perceived as ‘possibly for children’ by my Japanese-speaking audience.

Exoticism, Turkishness and parody

Part of *Şımarık*’s international success is due to its ‘exotic’ appeal. The popularity of the song can be historically linked to the spread of the musical soundscape of Islam, through Andalusia into Latin America, and to Southeast Asia (see e.g. Horowitz 2010; Weintraub 2010) and the European fascination with Ottoman music that includes works by Mozart and other ‘orientalist’ classical compositions (see e.g. Taylor 2007; Locke 2009). The way this exoticism trickles down through centuries into the popular music of the late 20th century is intriguing; it is particularly reflected in extra-musical elements, such as dance, videos and props, as well as the lyrics.

As I noted above, dance is foregrounded in nineteen of the interlingual cover versions. Eight of these involve belly dance – a dance which originated in the Middle East, particularly Egypt, but is often associated with Turkey on international platforms. Needless to say, *Şımarık*'s videos in Turkish never used belly dance, which would have been highly irrelevant, even contradictory, to the song's 'storyline'. Yet a considerable proportion of the covers signal the 'exotic' origins of the song through this dance.

The emphasis on bellydancing in the covers is only one form of foregrounding the 'exotic' in this song. As my informants observed, the prelude to the song is too unusual, for instance, for Anglophone ears for the Valance version to be fully integrated into the Anglo-American popular music scene, even though the English versions keep any reference to locality at arms' length, in favour of a more 'international' outlook. The transferable prelude, the oriental-sounding hook, the beat, the vibe become the main selling points. For unfamiliar 'Western' or 'Far Eastern' ears, it all sounds like 'Bollywood', 'Algerian', amorphous, not 'normal'. In some of the interlingual cover versions, this exoticism is further enhanced by the inclusion of other, unrelated 'exotic' elements, such as the flamenco moves of the Japanese singer and the flamenco guitar prelude to the Indonesian version. Here these elements do not necessarily indicate Spanishness, but rather 'distance' – the fact that the origins of this particular cover are from elsewhere, and that elsewhere lies somewhere far. The Korean version by Minha takes this 'distant foreignness' further. The video was the first Korean music video shot in London;¹¹ in preparation, Minha went to 'Europe' to take belly dancing lessons;¹² and, the backup dancers are all black.¹³

'Turkishness' is particularly foregrounded in interlingual covers which are intended as parodies. In the case of a parody, no copyright fees need to be paid, as parodies are often presented as 'critical commentaries' (Hutcheon 2006: 90) and can be placed under the rubric of 'fair use' (Marshall 2015: 288). Furthermore, there is a long history to the use of translation as parody, as drag, subverting socio-cultural norms, exaggerating or erasing differences. Going back to the distinction between knowing and unknowing audiences, however, parody only works if the audience knows that the original song is in Turkish. The Romanian version certainly avails itself of parody, in its use of unrelated Turkish words in its prelude, presumably intended as a humorous introduction to the song. The Hungarian version by Irigy Hónaljmirigy takes matters a step further, basing the whole cover on historical and contemporary stereotypes about Turkey: e.g. football (references to teams Galatasaray – Ankaragücü), *harem* (male dancers dressed as concubines, belly dancing in the background), polygamy (the refrain of the cover is 'There's much trouble with eight wives'), Gül Baba (known to Hungarians as an officer of the invading Ottoman army), and last but not least, a wordplay invoking Tarkan's name. These references to the Turkish/Ottoman culture reflect and deflect the acrimony of the Ottoman rule over Hungary in the 15th-16th centuries.¹⁴

The instrumental prelude of *Şımarık*, including the kissing sound, was revived as the main soundtrack to BBC World's Focus on Africa programme, broadcast on 28 October 2015,¹⁵ where satirist Ikenna Azuike interviews the Turkish ambassador to Zambia, Ahmet Arda, in Lusaka, on Turkish-Zambian relations. It seems that *Şımarık* is destined to act as a marker of 'Turkishness' for some years to come.

Globalisation, cosmopolitanism, diasporas

In his study on the two English covers of *Şımarık*, Kaindl notes that in the first English version, Tarkan's voice accompanies Soleil's. In the relevant video, 'the foreign, oriental quality of the music is visually re-interpreted as something primitive and wild' (2005: 257). In the second English version by Valance, however, 'electronic pop sound prevails, the voice

and the instruments are synthesized and distorted by computers' (*ibid.*: 258), coming up with a highly 'sexed-up' version, with the singer placed in a virtual environment as opposed to the rugged seaside of the first version. Kaindl thus observes

a translational process that goes from ethnicity to globalization. The original version is more and more transformed into a typical product of the globally predominant Western dance pop music. The folkloric elements only serve as 'decoration' and no longer represent an element that serves to localize the song in a given socio-cultural context (*ibid.*: 258-9).

What Regev calls 'the *pop-rockization* of world popular music' (2015: 201) arguably renders peripherally produced popular songs more 'translatable'. Pop-rock 'has ushered in the emergence and consolidation of *global electro-amplified soundscapes* and *aesthetic cosmopolitan bodies*' (*ibid.*: 205; emphases in the original). It is interesting to note, in this sense, the production date of *Şımarık*: 1997, i.e., towards the end of the decade when 'pop-rockization had become, globally speaking, a *fait accompli*' (*ibid.*: 204) affording audiences around the globe 'a sense of being local and trans-local at the same time' (*ibid.*: 207). One wonders whether the multiplication of interlingual cover versions from a peripheral language and culture was therefore particular to the turn of the 21st century.

Depending on where one positions oneself in relation to the debates surrounding globalisation and cosmopolitanism in music (Stokes 2007), one can see the developments in a less critical and more positive light. One can argue that national music scenes are increasingly interrelated, and to an extent, replaced by a scene where 'musics once perceived as foreign and outlandish have become familiar' (*ibid.*: 1). Or, one can be less celebratory of the globalization process and instead focus the attention on 'how people in specific places and at specific times have embraced the music of others, and how, in doing so, they have enabled music styles and musical ideas, musician [*sic*] and musical instruments to circulate (globally) in particular ways' (*ibid.*: 6). This restoring of human agency vis-à-vis the forces of globalization as a gargantuan system, is, of course, in line with DeNora's emphasis on the role of music in everyday social life. If music 'is in dynamic relation to social life, helping to invoke, stabilize and change the parameters of agency, collective and individual' (DeNora 2000: 20), if it 'has transformative powers' and "'does" things, changes things, makes things happen' (*ibid.*: 48), it is all at the level of individuals, in the way music works directly on the human body (*ibid.*: 75-108).

Recognition, through rhythms, corporeality, soundscapes of a *regional* musical identity (cf. Regev 2015: 206-7) covering an area from the Balkans to Middle East, is key to the spread of the interlingual covers of *Şımarık*. 'Intuitive, spontaneous bodily recognition of a given musical piece as one we know or like, one that "belongs" to our collective cultural identity, amounts to a performance of membership in this collective identity' (*ibid.*: 207). In a geographic region where music has been travelling around for centuries, it would be surprising not to encounter various covers of the same song in a variety of languages. The intricate finance of music industries, technological advances, migratory flows, and socio-economic relations all have a bearing on how and in which directions popular songs travel. For example, Kirkorov's Tarkan covers became popular in the late 1990s when Turkey was becoming the number one tourist destination for Russians.¹⁶

This international mobility is often further enhanced by the individual hybridity of the artists involved. Singers who first introduced the song to their target audiences are mostly multinational/multi-ethnic/multilingual. The first English version was recorded by Stella Soleil, a Greek-American; the first Hebrew version by Rinat Bar, a Georgian-Israeli; the first

Spanish version was by Hakim, a Moroccan-Spanish singer; the only Greek version was sung by Lefteris Pantazis, a Pontic Greek born in Uzbekistan. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that there are no Dutch, French or German covers of *Şımarık* (apart from two German *Smurfs* covers, as parodies for children). These are countries where the Turkish diaspora has a strong presence and/or where multicultural musical practices are already well-established. In France, where the single was unofficially known as ‘la chanson du bisou/ du baiser’ (the song of the kiss/kissing), the audiences’ familiarity with North African and Arabic music facilitated the wide-spread acceptance of the song as it is, in Turkish.¹⁷ Similarly, but for markedly different reasons, the song is listened to in its Turkish version in all the Turkic Republics, as a way of asserting ethnic/national identities, as well as in Turkic-dominant areas elsewhere, e.g. by the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang province in Northwest China.¹⁸

When the kiss disappears

In their observations on adaptations and appropriations, both Hutcheon (2006: 31-2; 167) and Sanders (2008: 154-60) refer to evolutionary natural selection, to concepts of mutation, survival and spread. Similarly, some songs prove to be more fecund, multiplying in the form of interlingual covers and doing rather well in their new environments. And some environments and contexts prove to be more fertile than others. Here I would like to focus on one particular example.

Yossi Piamenta’s *Kol Hamesameach* (2004) is a secondary cover from the first Hebrew version by Rinat Bar, which was already well-known in Israel. Piamenta was a former rock musician and guitarist, who later turned to religion and became part of the Chabad movement, one of the world’s best known Chasidic movements today. Piamenta began incorporating his previous musical experience into wedding music for Orthodox Jews and came to be in high demand in weddings in New York, particularly Brooklyn. After living for thirty two years in the United States, he seems to have settled back in his hometown Jerusalem.¹⁸

This second Hebrew version contains three parts. In the first part, the lyrics count from one to five in Yiddish; within the American context, using Yiddish comes across as ‘folksy’, with connotations of Europe. The second part is a paraphrase of the Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 6b as quoted in the writings of Nachman of Breslov. The third part is also a statement found in his writings, but is not based on anything that can be found in the Talmud. Altogether, the lyrics of the second Hebrew cover says: ‘One, two, three, four, five/ Whoever causes the bride and groom joy merits five voices/ It is a great *mitzvah* (commandment) to be (always) happy’. The onomatopoeia for the kiss is replaced with claps that punctuate the elaborate wedding dance choreographed to the song, as can be observed in the multitude of amateur videos available online, demonstrating the participants’ familiarity and ease with both the song and the choreographies.²⁰ As one can attest from the long playlist ‘dedicated to the Original New War Dance choreography by The Israeli Celebration dancers’,²¹ the song and the dance travelled within Jewish congregations all over the United States, and are thus a testimony to the ‘iterability’ of popular songs in new contexts. This dissemination is a pertinent example of the significance of music not only in national or international contexts but also at ‘more micro-social local and trans-local contexts through which music is appropriated and inscribed with discourses of identity, community and belonging’ (Bennett 2015: 150). This identity and belonging are demonstrated and contested in the comments on relevant Youtube videos (comments copied here as they appear online, with no corrections):

This is apparently a modern Hebraic dance. It's very fast and FUN! (2013)

I love that song, you do It almost the same as our congregation. I wish I had that kind of energy! (2014)

its Davidic dance not christian, we actually do a slightly different version in our service (2014)

Well, the version I learned from the Israeli Celebration Dancers who are a dance group in Colorado [...] (2013)

The original ISRAELI choreography is very different from what I've seen as well (it has a slightly belly dance-ish movement). Creative license I guess. (2012)

I like THIS choreography much better than the original one and I am going to use KOL HaSameakh next year in a Middle Eastern concert where I appear as a soloist. (2014)

In his seminal article, 'The Task of the Translator', Walter Benjamin suggests that a translation, rather than simply owing its existence to a prior, original work, offers this very original the chance to *extend* its own life and fame beyond what is historically possible (1923/1968). This chance of an 'afterlife' is evident in interlingual covers. While *Şımarık* has now been more or less forgotten in Turkey,²² its life span has extended beyond the borders. The song is certainly living on.

Conclusion

As in the case of other art forms, interlingual cover versions may introduce new genres into a musical system. These genres may then become part of national and cultural repertoires, both through the pioneering covers and subsequent autochthonous productions, as in the spread of tango or hip-hop worldwide. Such versions provide opportunities for reworking one's own language to make it malleable for the purposes of the imported genre. Like writers and poets who pursue inspiration through translating literature, lyricists and musicians may expand their own repertoires by covering foreign songs in their own languages. Lyrics are translated, adapted and rewritten for interlingual covers by those musicians and lyricists who recognise the cultural and economic potential in a song. Given the various legal loopholes in the music industry which make it extremely difficult for musicians and producers to keep track of their own music, the existence and spread of interlingual covers are not surprising. Nevertheless, it would be rather futile to approach the phenomenon through scenarios of theft or appropriation. As Sanders nicely puts it, 'those who attack the referential qualities of hip-hop music or digital sampling, bemoan song covers in the popular music charts, or criticize literature's inbuilt intertextualities on the grounds that it stifles individualism, find themselves expounding postmodernism' itself (Sanders 2008: 157-8).

When it comes to cover songs, it can be argued that there is a metonymic link between the original versions and the covers, rather than a metaphoric one. Covers do not necessarily replace the original. In the same way film adaptations may increase the sales of the novels they are based on, interlingual covers orient the audience to the original song. 'Multiple versions exist laterally, not vertically' notes Hutcheon (2006: xiii).

This article raised several issues in relation to interlingual covers and also touched upon various notions, such as translation, adaptation, palimpsest, parody, exoticism, reiteration, globalisation, and cosmopolitanism, in order to explore their suitability and relevance as conceptual tools for the study of interlingual songs. Due to space constraints, I could only discuss certain aspects, and had to sidestep others, such as the links between performativity, gender and dance, and issues related to multimodality. Here I would like to conclude by highlighting one more question: If the music remains more or less intact, what makes the

‘same’ music a holy wedding song or a vulgar parody? Can the concept of ‘context’ yield satisfactory answers to this question? In the case in hand, the music’s own properties have made the song malleable for multiple re-interpretations in a multitude of settings, but ultimately it is the framing from which meaning has been derived.

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Appendix 1 – *Şımarık*, lyrics and music by Sezen Aksu

| Turkish lyrics | Gloss translation | Idiomatic Translation ¹ |
|--|--|---|
| Takmış koluna elin adamını Beni orta yerimden çatlatıyor Ağzında sakızı şişirip şişirip Arsız arsız patlatıyor | A stranger on her arm She cracks me from the middle She keeps blowing bubbles with her gum And pops them cheekily/boldly | Arm in arm with some guy She drives me mad with jealousy Keeps blowing bubbles with her gum And pops them cheekily |
| Belki de bu yüzden vuruldu Sahibin olamadım ya | Maybe that's why I was hit/shot 'Cause I couldn't own you | Maybe that's why I fell for you 'Cause couldn't make you <i>my</i> girl |
| Sıgar mı erkekliğe seni şımarık Değişti mi bu dünya | Would this fit into masculinity/virility/manliness, you spoilt Has the world changed | Is this fair for a man, you spoilt thing Has the world turned upside down? |
| Çekmiş kaşına gözüne sürme Dudaklar kıpkırmızı kırıyor Bir de karşıma geçmiş utanması yok İnadıma inadıma sırtıyor | Kohl on her eyes and brows Lips bright red she walks coquettishly And she stands before me No shame Grins to me deliberately | Kohl on her eyes and brows Scarlet lips and flirty hips She flaunts/ defies me Shamelessly And grins coquettishly |
| Biz böyle mi gördük babamızdan Ele güne rezil olduk Yeni adet gelmiş eski köye vah Dostlar mahvolduk | Is this what we saw from our father We are disgraced in front of everyone New tradition in the old village Friends we are ruined | Is this how our fathers raised us We lost face in front of everyone Old dogs will have to learn new tricks now Brothers, we're done for |
| Seni gidi findıkkıran ² | You the nutcracker | You little tease |
| Yılanı deliğinden çıkaran ³ Kaderim, püsküllü belam | You the one who entices the serpent out of its nest | You little temptress/enchantress |

¹ I would like to thank Daria Zeynep Saraeva and Alex Leckie for their input into the idiomatic translation. Several amateur translations of the lyrics are available on the net, e.g. at <http://lyricstranslate.com/en/Simarik-Spoilt.html#ixzz3YnLkQAIF>, <http://lyricstranslate.com/en/node/86309#songtranslation#ixzz3YnLppx16>, <http://lyricstranslate.com/en/%C5%9F%C4%B1mar%C4%B1k-sassy.html#songtranslation#ixzz3YnM0I4tm>, <http://artists.letssingit.com/tarkan-lyrics-simarik-english-translation-nvzbpm#axzz3YnMeWLlG>.

² 'Findıkkıran' means a flirtatious, sassy and seductive woman in Turkish.

³ Referring to the common Turkish idiom "tatlı dil yılanı deliğinden çıkarır" (lit. sweet words would entice the serpent out of its nest).

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Yakalarsam, ... Ocağına düřtüm yavru Kucağına düřtüm yavru Sıcağına düřtüm yavru El aman ⁴ | My fate, my long-term affliction/nuisance/curse If I catch you, mwah mwah! I fell on to your hearth, baby I fell on to your lap, baby I fell on to your warmth, baby El aman | My fate, my life's sweet curse If I get hold of you, mwah mwah! I am at your mercy, babe I am in your arms, babe I am in your fire, babe Have mercy |
|---|--|--|

⁴ An interjection which goes back to the Arabic "al aman", meaning mercy.

Appendix 2 - Interlingual cover versions of *Şımarık*

- 1) Arabic
 - a) Lebanese Arabic – *El Bawsi* (The Kiss) Rida and Nina Boutros, 1999
 - b) Egyptian Arabic – *Layl ya Ayn* (The Kiss) Sami Mansour, late nineties or early 2000s
- 2) Brazilian Portuguese
 - a) *Beijo na Boca* (French Kiss), Mr. Jam (real name Fabianno Almeida), 2000 and 2003
 - b) *Selinho na Boca* (Peck on the Lips), Latino e Perlla, 2008
- 3) Bulgarian
 - a) Tonita - Day Mi Tseluvka, Tonita, 1999
 - b) *Искаш ли близалка?* (Do you want a lollipop?) Ruslan Mainov, 2002
- 4) Cantonese - Kiss Kiss, EO2 ft. Tiffany Lee, 2002
- 5) English
 - a) Kiss Kiss, Stella Soleil (U.S.), 2001
 - b) Kiss Kiss, Holly Valance (U.K. and Australia), 2002
- 6) German
 - a) Ein Kuss (A Kiss), The Smurfs, 1999
 - b) Kuss Kuss (Kiss Kiss), The Smurfs, after the English version
- 7) Greek - *Filakia* (Kisses), Lefteris Pantazis, 2000
- 8) Hebrew
 - a) *Ha-Neshika* (The Kiss), Rinat Bar, 2003
 - b) *Kol Hamesameach*, Yosi Piamenta, 2004
- 9) Hungarian
 - a) *8 feleséggel sok a baj – cupp cupp* (There are so many problems with 8 wives – muah muah), Irigy Hónaljmirigy, year?
 - b) *Pusz-pussz* (Muah Muah), Pa-Dö-Dö, 2001 or 2011?
- 10) Indonesian – *Kiss (Kita Sayang Sayang)* [Kiss (We are in Love)], Lilis Karlina, 2001
- 11) Italian – *Simarik (C'era nu sceccu)* (Once upon a time there was a mule), Mr Max, 2001
- 12) Japanese - *Chu!Chu!* (Muah Muah), Kentarō Hayami, real name Tanimoto Atsuo, 2000
- 13) Korean – *Kiss Kiss*, Mina, 2005
- 14) Dari (variety of the Persian language spoken in Afghanistan) – *Bos* (The Kiss), by Showwkat, year unknown
- 15) Persian
 - a) *Booseh* (The Kiss), Mehran, 1998
 - b) *Yeki Na Do Ta* (Not one but two), Sharareh, 2000
- 16) Romanian - Kiss-Kiss, Vacanța Mare, year unknown
- 17) Russian – *Поцелуй* (Kiss), Filipp Kirkorov, 1998
- 18) Montenegrin – *Ekstaza* (Ecstasy), Dado Polumenta, 2005
- 19) Serbian – *Žene Vole Dijamante* (Women Love Diamonds), Jelena Karleuša, 1998
- 20) Slovenian – *Poljubi me* (Kiss me), Sandi Selimčič, year unknown
- 21) Spanish
 - a) *Un Beso Turco* (A Turkish Kiss), Tres Fez (Latin America), 2000
 - b) *La Muchacha Turca* (Turkish Girl), Hakim (Spain), 2001
 - c) *La Muchacha Guapa* (Pretty Girl), La Banda Pachuco (L.A., with Mexican singers), 2001
- 22) Telugu – *Chiki Chiki Bam Bam*, by Tippu, 2002
- 23) Ukrainian – *Rozbeshchenyi* (Spoilt), Viktor Pavlik, 1999

NOTES

¹http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/abstract/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/om_o-9781561592630-e-0000006361?rskey=6kyjNk&result=1 (accessed 3.11.2018).

² Video of the song is accessible at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0HuEvYNJNk> (accessed 18.2.2016).

³ Albanian, Arabic (2 versions), Brazilian Portuguese (2), Bulgarian (2), Cantonese, Dari, English (2), German (2), Greek, Hebrew (2), Hungarian (2), Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Montenegrin, Persian (2), Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Slovenian, Spanish (3), Telugu, Ukrainian. Amongst these versions, I could not access any information on the Albanian, Dari and Slovenian ones.

⁴ In a 2006 interview, Tarkan admitted that this had been done without Aksu's consent, who was the true copyright owner. As Tarkan was one of Aksu's protégés, this situation did not seem to have caused any copyrights dispute. <http://dictionary.sensagent.com/%C5%9E%C4%B1mar%C4%B1k/en-en/> (accessed 23.4.2015).

⁵ [http://musicid.academicrightspress.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/search/result?singles\[\]=356370](http://musicid.academicrightspress.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/search/result?singles[]=356370), [http://musicid.academicrightspress.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/search/result?albums\[\]=410915](http://musicid.academicrightspress.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/search/result?albums[]=410915) and <http://dictionary.sensagent.com/%C5%9E%C4%B1mar%C4%B1k/en-en/> (accessed 23.4.2015).

⁶ <http://dictionary.sensagent.com/%C5%9E%C4%B1mar%C4%B1k/en-en/> (accessed 9.2.2016).

⁷ See http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMzcXmzkxODA4.html?from=s1.8-1-1.2 for a sample (accessed 18.2.2016). A video of a group of girls in National Taiwan University doing belly dancing to this song can be watched at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yRIBV3nLL0> (accessed 18.2.2016). My thanks to Lingli Xie for alerting me to these videos.

⁸ The musical style(s) brought to Israel by Jews from the 'East' (*Mizrahi* means Eastern in Hebrew).

⁹ On iterability and song lyrics, see also Eckstein 2010: 34.

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarkan_%28singer%29 (accessed 16.2.2016).

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bkHDx6GDWs> (accessed 3.6.2015).

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shim_Mina (accessed 3.6.2015).

¹³ This mishmash of foreignness did not do well in the Korean context, though, and the album sold a mere 10,000 – a failure for Korean standards (*ibid.*).

¹⁴ Other regions which were similarly under Ottoman rule, however, have a different attitude. Serbia, for instance, differentiates itself from other former Yugoslavian countries, such as Croatia, through an emphasis on its Balkan heritage, which owes substantially to an Ottoman/Turkish past. Therefore, Turkish-origin music succeeds in Serbia. I would like to thank Francis Jones for this observation.

¹⁵ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-34663096> (accessed 16.2.2016) I would like to thank Arzu Eker-Roditakis for drawing my attention to this programme.

¹⁶ This can be attested by the Turkish flag t-shirt worn by Kirkorov, in his music video shot at a tourist resort in Turkey. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXeWT3UDm7k> (accessed 16.6.2016).

¹⁷ My thanks to Sylvain Caschelin for this observation.

¹⁸ I would like to thank Joanne Smith Finley for this observation.

¹⁹ <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/153100#.VXBAr9VjDU> (accessed 4.6.15).

²⁰ E.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2x7hVzklE>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFAIV8JwN7M>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wc9kjdZ8ov8>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JPWA4Qt8eU>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sZyoXOPdwk> (accessed 16.6.2016).

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLGOLNnxq2HKWfNMhWRXtXi1XdYZ-MUZx9> (accessed 16.6.2016).

²² As of August 2018, the various *Şımarık* videos on Youtube have a total of more than 12 million views, compared to the more than 273 million views of Tarkan's newest hit *Yolla* released in 2017.